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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this instructional resource is to provide guidelines for conducting literature discussion groups using a book club approach. The procedures and guidelines that are presented in the resource are the result of 4 years of research related to book clubs. The guidelines and procedures in the resource include information about the roles of participants, the amount of time spent on each task, and the reading materials that are used. (Author/RS)

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Literature Discussion Groups:
Guidelines for Moderators–
A Book Club Approach

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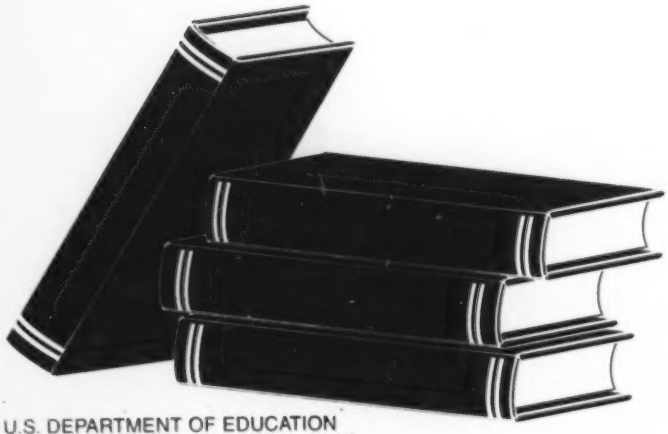

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Abstract. *The purpose of this Instructional Resource is to provide guidelines for conducting literature discussion groups using a book club approach. The procedures and guidelines that are presented are the result of 4 years of research related to book clubs. The guidelines and procedures include information about the roles of participants, the amount of time spent on each task, and the materials that are used.*

During lunch, before school, and after school, more and more teachers can be found gathered together to talk about books. Some of this talk often takes place in a book club format. The popularity of book clubs has been growing in recent years in the United States (Rabinovitz, 1992). Through their talk, teachers share reflections, insights, and teaching ideas about texts. Flood, Lapp, and Ranck-Buhr (1993) found that book clubs often help build collegial bonds. Over time, relationships begin to form among participants and their trust of one another grows. Teachers begin to see one another in a more personal way and this leads to greater understanding between and among participants (Flood, Lapp, Alvarez et al., 1995). As trust grows, participants freely talk about their interpretations of books and stories as well as their instructional approach to literature in their own classrooms (Flood, Lapp, Ranck-Buhr, & Moore, 1995). As one teacher in a book club stated, "This group has helped its members find a forum where all thoughts and opinions were welcomed and respected. It also helped the participants come to know one another better. These new relationships have carried over into other areas of our education program" (Bealor, 1992, p. 23).

Conducting a Book Club Discussion

Conducting a book club discussion requires some structure to ensure the book club is a student-centered experience that permits members of the group to have opportunities to share and reflect upon the reading. We have experienced a great deal of success using the following procedures:

Procedure	Time (min)	Group Format	Size of Group
Prior to Book Club Sessions:			
Participants read the selection and write a response in their journal to the text being read.	20–30	I	1
During Book Club Sessions:			
1. Participants review their journal entries and revisit the text by scanning.	1–2	I	1
2. Participants read what they wrote and underline/highlight words or phrases that they want to share with their partner; and/or they write a brief new entry which is a reflection about their written response or they write a new thought/question based upon their review of the text.	3–4	I	1
3. Participants share responses with a partner.	2–4	P	2
4. Moderator leads a discussion with the group.	10–15	G	7–8
Moderator begins the discussion by asking participants to share their thoughts based upon their reading/writing and discussion of text with their partners. Content-specific questions were prepared in advance to focus the discussion if it strayed too far afield or became too bogged down on a point that seemed to be unresolvable.			

Procedure	Time (min)	Group Format	Size of Group
5. Journal Writing When the discussion seems to have run its course, ask participants to write a response to a pointed question. For example, What surprised you most about the discussion of the text? (i.e., What caused you to say"Wow!"); or What questions do you have about the text or discussion at this point? (i.e., What's still puzzling you?); or What word or phrase caught your attention enough for you to have savored it? (i.e., Why do you think it was so memorable?).	4	I	1
6. Participants share responses with a partner.	10	P	2
7. Participants return to a large-group discussion. Responses based on the previous writing are invited.	2–4	G	7–8
8. Participants are asked to write a journal entry based on the following: Write about your own growth in interpreting this text based upon your participation in journal writing and discussions. You are also invited to write about how you see the text at this point.	2–4	I	1

Note. Grouping format: I = individual; P = pairs; G = group.

Suggested Readings

Selecting books for a book club is no different than selecting books for any other reading purpose. Titles should be selected based on the interests of the group members. Each book club member could be invited to provide a reading selection for the group.

In our teacher book clubs, we have found that collections of short stories work well for several reasons: they provide reading material for several discussions, they are short enough to be read in one sitting, and they cover a wide variety of topics. The following is a list of books that we have used in our teacher book clubs.

Short Stories & Short Story Collections

Woman Hollering Creek
(Collection) by Sandra Cisneros
House on Mango Street
(Collection) by Sandra Cisneros
"Why Did the Balinese Chicken Cross the Road?"
by Alice Walker
"You Need to Go Upstairs"
by Rumer Godden
"My Posse Don't Do Homework"
by LouAnne Johnson
"Olivia"
by Dorothy Strachey
"The Scholarship Jacket"
by Marta Salinas
"Longing to Die of Old Age"
by Alice Walker
"Am I an American?"
by Peter Irons
"The Mustache"
by Robert Cormier
"The Circuit"
by Francisco Jimenez

Novels

Spider Woman's Granddaughters
edited by Paula Gunn Allen
The Bluest Eye
by Toni Morrison
Their Eyes Were Watching God
by Zora Neale Hurston
Joy Luck Club
by Amy Tan

Guidelines

In our teacher book clubs, we generated the following guidelines that helped us as we started our book clubs.

- Be prepared to discuss your thoughts about the text by completing your reading and writing before the literature discussion begins.
- Be courteous by listening to everyone's comments.
- Be sensitive to people's feelings as you make your contributions to the discussion.
- Wait until the speaker is finished before beginning your comments.
- Make your comments positive and constructive.
- Feel free to question and agree/disagree by clearly and calmly stating your opinion.
- Assume responsibility for your own growth.

It would be beneficial for each book club to generate their own guidelines.

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